



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release MAY 5, 1961

LAND LEASE PROJECT OPENS NEW MEXICO AREA TO HUNTERS AND FISHERMEN

New Mexico may use Federal aid funds in the payment of annual rental for hunting and fishing rights on 11,411,000 acres of State trust lands, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall said today.

The agreement which now permits public access for hunting and fishing activities on the trust lands was completed March 14 between the New Mexico Department of Fish and Game and the State Land Office. The annual payment for these privileges is a half-cent per acre or more than \$55,000. In a ruling just made by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Aid for the Restoration of Wildlife funds may be used to reimburse the State Fish and Game Department up to 75 percent of this amount.

Secretary Udall earlier had directed Max N. Edwards, Assistant to the Secretary and Legislative Counsel, to coordinate the Department's roll to provide funds for New Mexico under the Pittman-Robertson Act. Edwards worked closely with C. Melvin Neal, Chairman of the Fish and Game Commission and Earl Hartley, Attorney General.

The opening of these State trust lands to sportsmen will set the stage for a broader multiple use program of benefit to an even larger segment of the State's population. In past years these areas have been closed to sportsmen by competing land-use interests, and the need for public access to this substantial acreage has been recognized as critical to sportsmen, game administrators and other recreationists.

Under the new easement plan, the Game Department will have better control of hunting pressure to effect a more adequate harvest of various game species. Surplus big game, for example, can be removed where ranges are being damaged by

overgrazing. It will also permit the better cropping of presently unhunted cyclic game species such as the native quail. Game Department employees are given unrestricted right of entry on these lands to conduct such activities as are necessary for the propagation, management and harvest of game and fish species.

Federal Aid funds for the Restoration of Wildlife are derived from an 11 percent Federal excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition. The funds are administered by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife and are made available to the several State fish and game departments for wildlife land acquisition, habitat improvement and research studies on approved projects. Annual apportionments of excise tax receipts are made to the States under formulas prescribed by law based upon land area and the number of paid hunting license holders in each State.

Mr. Neal estimates that the project will increase the fees collected from fishing and hunting licenses about \$100,000 and will add an additional \$3 million to the economy of New Mexico.

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